

GALLERIES

The art of spying on the digital world

BY MARK JENKINS

We are our digital data, or maybe it's the other way around. But how to actually express our virtual identities, which are stored in forms that are essentially invisible? That's the objective of "Surveillance Blind," a Goethe-Institut show of four U.S. and two German artists.

Amiel Laurie Erickson, unable to discern or disclose the information they contain, merely photographs server farms, their facades as blank as the Facebook logo on a flag that flies outside one of them.

Nate Larson (the show's Baltimore-based curator) and Marni Shindelman use GPS coordinates embedded in tweets to locate the place they originated, which they then photograph to tie the electronic remark to the physical world. John Vigg enlists drone technology to document New Jersey's lightly populated Pine Barrens.

Perhaps because of their country's fraught 20th-century history, the Germans are more apprehensive, and more provocative. Simon Menner begins with archives that are even scarier than Facebook's — those of the Stasi, the former East German secret police. Menner mixes photos from its files with simulated surveillance pictures in which he assumes multiple personas. Is he a spy in various disguises or an Everyman who's always under observation?

The answer is clear in Jens Sundeheim's intriguing project "The Traveler." The artist stands in front of security cameras that have a public feed, regarding the devices as they scrutinize him, and then exhibits stills from the videos. So far, he writes, he has posed for more than 600 webcams in 19 countries. Acknowledging the camera in this way is a refreshing breach of information-age etiquette, but not everyone thinks it merely impolite. Sundeheim has tangled with the New York City



ABOVE: "Bridge 1," is part of Leah Appel's photographic series in which she uses a Holga, a cheap plastic device, for its distortions.

RIGHT: WonJung Choi fuses bits of intricate metalwork, including antique silverware, into her works.



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Gordana Gerskovic Focusing intently on surfaces

Leah Appel: New Work: Holga Panoramas On view through Nov. 28 at Hilber Art Space, 9 Hilber Ct., NW. 202-338-0680. www.hilberartspace.org

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that are weathered, cracked or peeling, photographer Gordana Gerskovic reveals a world in exquisite deterioration. Fractal-like forms and found compositions akin to color-field painting abound in her "Metamorphosis - From Decay to Display." Foundry Gallery's first show in its new, industrial-chic location near the 9-30 Club.

The Croatian-born local artist is not averse to reading recognizable images into her abstractions, as she demonstrates with such titles as "Christ" (rusty drips that resemble a crucifix) and "Girl With a Parrot" (clearly a silhouetted face, although the bird is debatable).

Other pictures of tiny dust-bunnies suggest much larger ones, such as a river delta or a dry lake bed. But Gerskovic's small-scale photos most often capture a place and time where atrocity and beauty dovetail.

She's not wrong to call one of these works "Tranquility."

Gordana Gerskovic: Metamorphosis - From Decay to Display On view through Nov. 22 at Foundry Gallery, 2118 Eighth St. NW. 202-232-0203. www.foundrygallery.org

Where Gordana Gerskovic photographs imperfections, Leah Appel relies on her camera to provide them. She uses a Holga, a cheap plastic device (by some) for its distortions, light leaks and sheer uncontrollability. She sometimes double- or triple-exposes the film to amplify the visual chaos. Her "New Work: Holga Panoramas," at Hilber Art Space, showcases images that are beguilingly undefinitive.

Appel, who divides her time between Washington and New York, focuses on fairly common subjects in both cities. What makes the pictures fresh are the semi-intentional bloopers. Harsh red flashes interrupt the calm blue skies over official Washington, and the marquee of a Manhattan landmark seems to stutter its name: "Radio C City ty." Like all photos, Appel's are as eternal as their paper and pigment. But these appear exceptionally trustworthy with a slipperiness that rebukes the very idea of capturing a moment for all time.

Leah Appel: New Work: Holga Panoramas On view through Nov. 28 at Hilber Art Space, 9 Hilber Ct., NW. 202-338-0680. www.hilberartspace.org

Tony Savoie For his previous Long View Gallery shows, Tony Savoie usually painted on clear acrylic panels that allow a glimpse of collaged elements beneath the surface.

The Florida artist's "New Work" includes one such piece, "Oxiate of the Masses," which lines up rows of pill bottles under the plastic. The other combine-paintings are not tied in the same way, but they are nonetheless layered — with lumpy paint, shiny resin and political outrage.

Commercial logos, bits of iconography from U.S. currency and images of war and disaster mingle in complex, urgent tableaux. The flame-hued "Landing" depicts a massive conflagration, perhaps a refinery fire or a battle scene. That it might be the latter is prompted by such smaller works as "Weaponized Sparrow" and "Enhanced Dragonfly," which cross natural creatures with death-administering drones. Savoie used to contrast the banal and the baleful, but his style has become increasingly, and powerfully, sinister.

Tony Savoie: New Work On view through Nov. 22 at Long View Gallery, 1234 North St. NW. 202-232-4788. www.longviewgallery.com. style@washpost.com

Mark Jenkins is a freelance writer.